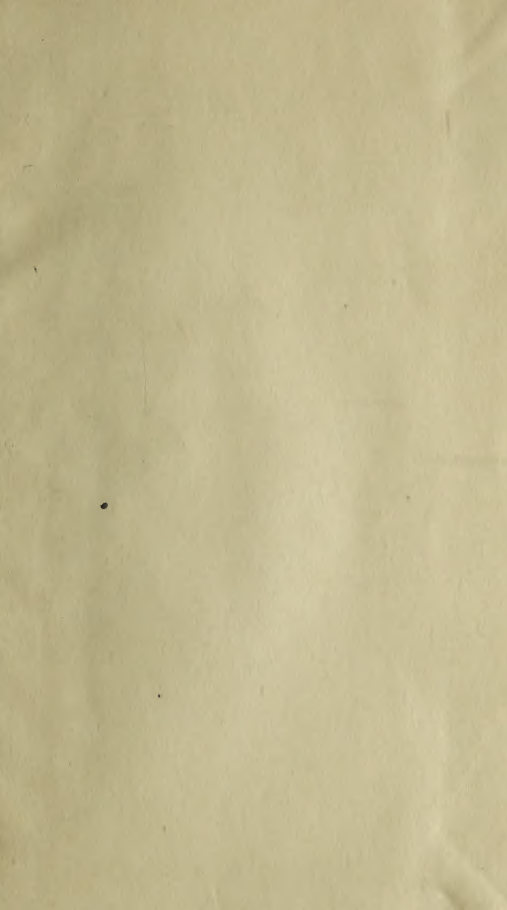


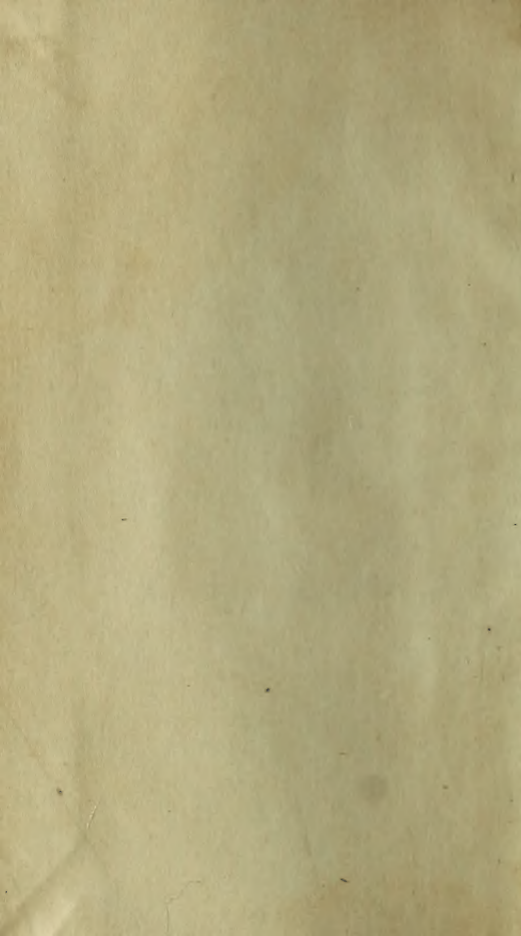
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THE
NECESSITY OF ATONEMENT,

AND

THE CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THAT AND
FREE GRACE, IN FORGIVENESS:

ILLUSTRATED IN THREE DISCOURSES.



BY JONATHAN EDWARDS, D.D.
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(New-York.)



SECOND EDITION.

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THE Div. S.  
NECESSITY OF ATONEMENT, &c.

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DISCOURSE I.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. EPHES. i. 7.

THE doctrine of the forgiveness of sins is a capital doctrine of the gospel, and is much insisted on by the writers of the New Testament : above all, by the author of this epistle. In our text, he asserts that we are forgiven *according to the riches of grace* : not merely in the exercise of grace, as the very term forgiveness, implies : but in the exercise of *the riches of grace* : importing that forgiveness is an act of the most *free and abundant* grace. Yet he also asserts that this gratuitous forgiveness is in consequence of a *redemption by the blood of Christ*. But how are these two parts of the proposition consistent ? If we be in the literal sense forgiven in consequence of a redemption, we are forgiven on ac-

count of the price of redemption previously paid. How then can we be truly said to be *forgiven*: a word which implies the exercise of *grace*? and especially how can we be said to be forgiven according to the *riches of grace*? This is at least a seeming inconsistency. If our forgiveness be purchased, and the price of it be already paid, it seems to be a matter of debt, and not of grace. This difficulty hath occasioned some to reject the doctrine of Christ's redemption, satisfaction, or atonement. Others, who have not been driven to that extremity by this difficulty, yet have been exceedingly perplexed and embarrassed. Of these last, I freely confess myself to have been one. Having from my youth devoted myself to the study of theoretic and practical theology, this has to me been one of the *gordian knots* in that science. How far what shall now be offered towards a solution, ought to afford satisfaction, is submitted to the judgment of my candid auditors.

Our text naturally suggests these three inquiries,

Are the sinners forgiven through the redemption or atonement of Jesus Christ only? What is the reason or ground of this mode of forgiveness? Is this mode of forgiveness consistent with *grace*, or *according to the riches of grace*? Let us consider these in their order.

I. Are we forgiven through the redemption or atonement of Jesus Christ only? I say, redemption or atonement, because, in my view, they mutually imply each other. That we are forgiven through the atonement of Christ, and can be forgiven in no other way, the scriptures very clearly teach. For evidence as to the first of these particulars, I appeal to the following passages of scripture, which are indeed but a few of the many which exhibit the same truth. First, our text itself: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Romans iii. 24. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ." Acts xx. 28. "To feed the church of God, which he hath pur-

chased with his own blood." Hebrews ix. 12. "By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." 1 Peter i. 18. "Forasmuch as ye know, that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." *ibid.* chap. ii. 24. "Who his ownself bare our sins, in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness : by whose stripes ye were healed." Isaiah liii. 4, 5, 6. "He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows—he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us ail." *Ibid.* v. 10, 11, 12. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him ; he hath put him to grief ; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed. He shall bear their iniquities. And he bare the sins of many."

The scriptures also teach the absolute necessity of the atonement of Christ, and that we can obtain forgiveness and salvation through that only. The sacrifices appointed to be made by the ancient Israelites, seem evidently to point to Christ ; and to show the necessity of the vicarious sacrifice of him, who is therefore said to be “ our passover sacrificed for us ;” and to have given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savor ;” and “ now once in the end of the world, to have appeared, to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself.” 1 Cor. v. 7. Eph. v. 2. Heb. ix. 26. As the ancient Israelites could obtain pardon in no other way than by those sacrifices ; this teaches us that we can obtain it only by the sacrifice of Christ.

The positive declarations of the New Testament teach the same truth still more directly, as Luke xxiv. 25, 26. “ O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory ?”

verse 46. "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day." Romans iii. 25, 26. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness that he might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." It seems that God could not have been just in justifying the believer, had not Christ been made a propitiation. John iii. 14, 15. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up." Heb. ix. 22. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." 1 Cor. iii. 11. "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Acts iv. 12. "Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is no other name, under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."

The necessity of the death and atonement of Christ sufficiently appears by the bare event of his death. If his death were not necessary, he died in vain. But we cannot suppose that either

he or his father would have consented to his death, had it not been absolutely necessary. Even a man of common wisdom and goodness, would not consent either to his own death or that of his son, but in a case of necessity, and in order to some important and valuable end. Much less can we suppose, that either Christ Jesus the Son would have consented to his own death, or that the infinitely wise and good Father would have consented to the death of his only begotten and dearly beloved Son, in whom his soul was well pleased, and who was full of grace and truth, the brightness of his own glory and the express image of his person, the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely, if there had not been the most urgent necessity. Especially as this most excellent Son so earnestly prayed to the Father, to exempt him from death. Mat. xx. 39. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." The Son himself hath told us, John xi. 42. "That the Father heareth him always:"

and therefore we may be sure, that if the condition of his pathetic petition had taken place ; if it had been possible, that the designs of God in the salvation of sinners should be accomplished, without the death of Christ ; Christ's prayer, in this instance, would have been answered, and he would have been exempted from death. And since he was not exempted, we have clear evidence, that his death was a matter of absolute necessity.

The necessity of the atonement of Christ, is clearly taught by the apostle. Gal. ii. 21. " If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." It is to no purpose to pretend that the law, in this passage means the ceremonial law ; because he tells us, chap. iii. 21. " That if there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." But the moral law was a law which had been given ; and since no law which had been given could give life, it follows, that forgiveness and life could not be by the moral law, any more than by the cere-



monial, and that if they could, Christ is dead in vain.

II. Our next inquiry is, what is the reason or ground of this mode of forgiveness? Or why is an atonement necessary in order to the pardon of the sinner? I answer, it is necessary on the same ground and for the same reasons, as punishment would have been necessary, if there had been no atonement made. The ground of both is the same. The question then comes to this: why would it have been necessary, if no atonement had been made, that punishment should be inflicted on the transgressors of the divine law? This, I suppose, would have been necessary, *to maintain the authority of the divine law*. If that be not maintained, but the law fall into contempt, the contempt will fall equally on the legislator himself; his authority will be despised, and his government weakened. And as the contempt shall increase, which may be expected to increase, in proportion to the neglect of executing the law; the divine government will approach nearer and nearer to

a dissolution, till at length it will be totally annihilated.

But when moral creatures are brought into existence, there must be a moral government. It cannot be reconciled with the wisdom and goodness of God to make intelligent creatures and leave them at random, without moral law and government. This is the dictate of reason from the nature of things. Besides the nature of things, we have in the present instance fact, to assist our reasoning. God hath in fact given a moral law and established a moral government over his intelligent creatures. So that we have clear proof, that infinite wisdom and goodness judged it to be necessary, to put intelligent creatures under moral law and government. But in order to a moral law, there must be a penalty; otherwise it would be mere advice, but no law. In order to support the authority and vigor of this law, the penalty must be inflicted on transgressors. If a penalty be denounced indeed, but never inflicted; the law becomes no law, as really as if no penalty

had been annexed to it. As well might no law have been made or published, with all the most awful penalties, and these never be inflicted. Nay, in some respects it would be much better and more reconcileable with the divine perfections. It would be more consistent, and shew that the legislator was not ignorant, either of his own want of power to carry a law into effect, or of the rights of his subjects, or of the boundaries between right and wrong. But to enact a law and not execute it, implies a weakness of some kind or other : either an error of judgment, or a consciousness of a depraved design in making the law, or a want of power to carry it into effect, or some other defect. Therefore such a proceeding as this is dishonorable and contemptible ; and by it, both the law and legislator not only appear in a contemptible light, but really are contemptible.

Hence, to execute the threatening of the divine law, is necessary to preserve the dignity and authority of the law, and of the author of it, and to the very exist-

ence of the divine moral government. It is no impeachment of the divine power and wisdom, to say, that it is impossible for God himself to uphold his moral government, over intelligent creatures, when once his law hath fallen into contempt. He may indeed govern them by irresistible force, as he governs the material world : but he cannot govern them by law, by rewards and punishments.

If God maintain the authority of his law, by the infliction of the penalty, it will appear, that he acts consistently in the legislative and executive parts of his government. But if he were not to inflict the penalty, he would act and appear to act, an inconsistent part ; or to be inconsistent with himself. If the authority of the divine law be supported by the punishment of transgressors, it will most powerfully tend to restrain all intelligent creatures from sin. But if the authority of the law be not supported, it will rather encourage and invite to sin, than restrain from it.

For these reasons, which are indeed all implied in supporting the dignity and

authority of the divine law, it would have been necessary, had no atonement for sin been made, that the penalty of the law be inflicted on transgressors.

If in this view of the matter, it should be said, 'Though for the reasons before mentioned, it is necessary that the penalty of the law, in many instances, or in most instances, be inflicted ; yet why is it necessary, that it should be inflicted in every instance ? Why could not the Deity, in a sovereign way, without any atonement, have forgiven at least some sinners ? Why could not the authority of the law have been sufficiently supported, without the punishment of every individual transgressor ? We find that such strictness is not necessary or even subservient to the public good, in human governments : and why is it necessary in the divine ? To these inquiries I answer, by other inquiries. Why, on the supposition of no atonement, would it have been necessary, that the penalty of the law should be inflicted in any instance ? Why could not the Deity in a sovereign way, without any

atonement, have pardoned all mankind? I presume it will be granted, for the reasons before assigned, that such a proceeding as this, would be inconsistent with the dignity and authority of the divine law and government. And the same consequence in a degree, follows from every instance of pardon in this mode. It is true the ends of human governments are tolerably answered, though in some instances the guilty are suffered to pass with impunity. But as imperfection attends all human affairs; so it attends human governments in this very particular, that there are reasons of state which require, or the public good requires, that gross criminals, in some instances, be dismissed with impunity, and without atonement. Thus, because the government of David was weak, *and the sons of Zeruah were too hard for him*, Joab, a most atrocious murderer, could not, during the life of David, be brought to justice. In other instances, atrocious criminals are pardoned, in order to obtain information against others still more atrocious, and

dangerous to the community. In many instances, the principals only in certain high crimes, are punished : the rest being led away by artifice and misrepresentation, are not supposed to deserve punishment. And it is presumed, that in every instance, wherein it is really for the good of the community, to pardon a criminal, without proper satisfaction for his crime ; it is because of either some weakness in the particular state of the government, under which the pardon is granted ; or some imperfection in the laws of that state, not being adapted to the particular case ; or some imperfection attending all human affairs. But as not any of these is supposable in the divine government, there is no arguing conclusively, from pardons in human governments, to pardons in the divine.

It may be added, that in every instance in human governments, in which just laws are strictly executed, the government is so far weakened, and the character of the rulers either legislative or executive, suffers, either in point of abil-

ity or in point of integrity. If it be granted that the law is just, and condemns sin to no greater punishment than it deserves, and if God were to pardon it without atonement, it would seem, that he did not hate sin in every instance, nor treat it as being what it really is, infinitely vile.

For these reasons it appears that it would have been necessary, provided no atonement had been made, that the penalty of the law should have been inflicted, even in every instance of disobedience : and for the same reasons doubtless was it necessary, that if any sinners were to be pardoned, they should be pardoned only in consequence of an adequate atonement. The atonement is the substitute for the punishment threatened in the law ; and was designed to answer the same ends of supporting the authority of the law, the dignity of the divine moral government, and the consistency of the divine conduct in legislation and execution. By the atonement it appears that God is determined that his law shall be supported ; that it



shall not be despised or transgressed with impunity ; and that it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God.

The very idea of an atonement or satisfaction for sin, is something which, to the purposes of supporting the authority of the divine law, and the dignity and consistency of the divine government, is equivalent to the punishment of the sinner, according to the literal threatening of the law. That which answers these purposes being done, whatever it be, atonement is made, and the way is prepared for the dispensation of pardon. In any such case, *God can be just and yet the justifier of the sinner.* And that that which is sufficient to answer these purposes, has been done for us according to the gospel plan, I presume none can deny, who believe, that the eternal word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and that he the only begotten and well beloved Son of God, John i. 14. bare our sins in his own body on the tree. 1 Peter ii. 24. and gave himself a sacrifice to God for us. Eph. v. 2.

But perhaps some who may readily

grant that what Christ hath done and suffered, is undoubtedly sufficient to atone for the sins of his people; may also suppose that if God had seen fit so to order it, we might have made a sufficient atonement for our own sins. Or whether they believe in the reality and sufficiency of the atonement of Christ or not, they may suppose that we might have atoned, or even now may atone, for our own sins. This hypothesis therefore demands our attention.

If we could have atoned, by any means, for our own sins, it must have been either by our repentance and reformation, or by enduring a punishment, less in degree or duration, than that which is threatened in the law as the wages of sin. No other way for us to atone for our own sins appears to be conceivable. But if we attend to the subject, we shall find that we can make no proper atonement in either of these ways.

1. We could not make atonement for our sins by repentance and reformation. Repentance and reformation are

a mere return to our duty, which we ought never to have forsaken or intermitted. Suppose a soldier deserts the service into which he is enlisted, and at the most critical period not only forsakes his general and the cause of his country, but joins the enemy and exerts himself to his utmost in his cause, and in direct opposition to that of his country; yet after twelve months spent in this manner, he repents and returns to his duty and his former service: will this repentance and reformation atone for his desertion and rebellion? will his repentance and return, without punishment, support the authority of the law against desertion and rebellion, and deter others from the like conduct equally as the punishment of the delinquent according to law? It cannot be pretended. Such a treatment of the soldier would express no indignation or displeasure of the general at the conduct of the soldier: it would by no means convince the army or the world, that it was a most heinous crime to desert and join the standard of the enemy. Just so in the case under

consideration : the language of forgiving sinners barely on their repentance is, that he who sins shall repent ; that the curse of the law is repentance ; that he who repents shall suffer, and that he deserves no further punishment. But this would be so far from an effectual tendency to discourage and restrain from sin, that it would greatly encourage to the commission and indulgence of it ; as all that sinners would have to fear, on this supposition, would be not the wrath of God, not any thing terrible, but the greatest blessing to which any man in this life can attain, repentance. If this were the condition of forgiving sinners, not only no measures would be taken to support the divine law, but none to vindicate the character of God himself, or to shew that he acts a consistent part, and agreeably to his own law ; or that he is a friend to virtue and an enemy to vice. On the other hand, he would rather appear as a friend to sin and vice, or indifferent concerning them. What would you think of a prince who should make a law against murder, and

should threaten it with a punishment properly severe ; yet should declare that none who should be guilty of that crime and should repent, should be punished ? or if he did not positively declare this, yet should in fact suffer all murderers who repented of their murders, to pass with impunity ? Undoubtedly you would conclude that he was either a very weak or a very wicked prince ; either that he was unable to protect his subjects, or that he had no real regard to their lives or safety, whether in their individual or collective capacity.

2. Neither could we make atonement by any sufferings short of the full punishment of sin. Because the very idea of atonement is something done, which to the purpose of supporting the authority of the law, the dignity and consistency of divine government and conduct, is fully equivalent to the curse of the law, and on the ground of which, the sinner may be saved from that curse. But no sufferings endured by the sinner himself, short of the curse of

the law, can be to these purposes equivalent to that curse ; any more than a less number or quantity can be found equal to a greater. Indeed a less degree or duration of suffering endured by Christ the Son of God, may, on account of the infinite dignity and glory of his person, be an equivalent to the curse of the law endured by the sinner : as it would be a far more striking demonstration of a king's displeasure, to inflict, in an ignominious manner, on the body of his own son, forty stripes save one ; than to punish some obscure subject with death. But when the person is the same, it is absurd to suppose that a less degree or duration of pain can be equal to a greater, or can equally strike terror into the minds of spectators, and make them fear and no more do any such wickedness. Deut. xiii. 11.

Besides ; if a less degree or duration of punishment, inflicted on the sinner, would answer all the purposes of supporting the authority of the divine law, &c. equally as that punishment which is threatened in the law ; it follows that

the punishment which is threatened in the law is too great, is unjust, is cruel and oppressive : which cannot be as long as God is a just being.

Thus it clearly appears, that we could never have atoned for our own sins. If therefore atonement be made at all, it must be made by some other person : and since as we before argued, Christ the Son of God hath been appointed to this work, we may be sure, that it could be done by no other person of inferior dignity.

It may be inquired of those who deny the necessity of the atonement of Christ, whether the mission, work and death of Christ were at all necessary in order to the salvation of sinners. If they grant that they were necessary, as they exhibit the strongest motives to repentance ; I ask further, could not God by any revelation or motives otherwise, whether externally or internally, exhibited, lead sinners to repentance ? We find he did in fact, without the mission, work and death of Christ, lead the saints of the Old Testament to repentance. And

doubtless in the same way, he might have produced the same effect, on men of modern times. Why then doth the scripture say, "Other foundations can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ : " and, "neither is there salvation in any other ?" If it be said that these texts are true, as God hath seen fit to adopt and establish this mode of salvation : it occurs at once, that then it may with equal truth be said, concerning those who were converted by the preaching of Paul ; other foundation could no man lay, for their salvation, than the apostle Paul. In this sense too every event which ever takes place, is equally necessary as the mission and death of Christ : and it was in no other sense necessary, that Christ should be sent and die, than that a sparrow should fall, or not fall, to the ground. In short to say, that the mission and death of Christ were necessary, because God had made this constitution, is to resolve all into the sovereignty of God, and to confess that no reason of Christ's mission and death is assignable.



Besides ; if the mission, death and resurrection of Christ, and the knowledge of them, be, by divine constitution, made necessary to the salvation of sinners ; this will seem to be wholly inconsistent with the fundamental principle of the system of those who deny the atonement of Christ ; I mean the principle, that it is not reconcileable with the perfections of God, to refuse a pardon to any who repent. If bare repentance and reformation be the ground of pardon, doubtless all who repent, though ever so ignorant of Christ, his death and resurrection, and of the motives to repentance therein exhibited, are entitled to pardon ; and if so, in what sense will the Socinians say, the mission and death of Christ are necessary to pardon ? Not surely as purchasing salvation, for even those who are ignorant of them ; this is abhorrent to their whole system. Not as exhibiting the strongest motives to repentance ; because in the case now supposed, these motives are perfectly unknown. And they will not say, it is impossible for

any to repent, who are ignorant of Christ.\*

Again, how is it more consistent with the divine perfections, to confine pardon and salvation to the narrow limits of those who know and are influenced by the motives to repentance, implied in the death and resurrection of Christ; than to the limits of those who repent and depend on the atonement of Christ?

It may be further inquired of those gentlemen mentioned above, whether the pardon of the penitent, be according to the divine law, or according to the gospel. If it be a constitution of the law, that every penitent be pardoned, what then is the gospel? And wherein does the grace of the latter, exceed that of the former? Besides, is it not strange, to suppose that bare law knows any thing of repentance and of the

\* "It is certainly the doctrine of reason, as well as of the Old Testament, that God is merciful to the penitent, and nothing is requisite to make men, in all situations, the objects of his favor, but such moral conduct as he has made them capable of."

promise of pardon on repentance? Surely such a law must be a very gracious law: and a very gracious law and a very gracious gospel seem to be very nearly one and the same thing. It has been commonly understood that the divine law is the rule of justice. If so, and it be a provision of the law, that every penitent be acquitted from punishment; then surely there is no grace at all in the acquittal of the penitent, as the gentlemen to whom I now refer, pretend there is none on the supposition of the satisfaction of Christ. Again; if the law secure impunity to all penitents, then all the terror or punishment which the law threatens, is either repentance itself, or that wise and wholesome discipline which is necessary to lead to repentance; these are the true and utmost curse of the law. But neither of these is any curse at all; they are at least among the greatest blessings which can be bestowed on those who need them. But if it be granted that the bare law of God does not secure pardon to the penitent, but

admits of his punishment, it will follow that the punishment of the penitent would be nothing opposed to justice. Surely God hath not made an unjust law. It also follows, that to punish the penitent would be not at all inconsistent with the divine perfections; unless God hath made a law, which cannot in any instance be executed consistently with his own perfections. And if the punishment of the penitent, provided no atonement had been made, would not be inconsistent with justice, or with the perfections of God, who will say, that the pardon of the penitent, on the sole footing of an atonement, is inconsistent with either?

If neither strict justice, nor the divine law founded on justice, nor the divine perfections, without an atonement, secure pardon to all who repent, what will become of the boasted argument of the Socinians, against the atonement, that God will certainly pardon and save, and that it is absurd and impious to suppose, that he will not pardon and save, all who repent? Are the Socinians them-

selves certain, that God will not do that which eternal justice, his own law, and his own perfections allow him to do? The dilemma is this: eternal justice either requires that every penitent be pardoned in consequence of his repentance merely, or it does not. If it do require this, it follows, that pardon is an act of justice and not of grace: therefore let the Socinians be for ever silent on this head. It also follows, that repentance answers, satisfies, fulfils, the divine law, so that, in consequence of it, the law has no further demand on the sinner. It is therefore either the complete righteousness of the law, or the complete curse of the law: for cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. It also follows, that sin is no moral evil. Doubtless that which deserves no punishment, or token of the divine displeasure, is no moral evil. But the utmost that justice, on this hypothesis, requires of the sinner, is repentance, which is no token of the divine displeasure, but an inestimable

blessing. It also follows, that as eternal justice is no other than the eternal law of God, grace and truth, life and immortality came and were brought to light by Moses, since the law came by him; that the law contains exceeding great and precious promises, which promises however, exceeding great and precious as they are, are no more than assurances, that we shall not be injured. It follows in the last place that justice and grace, law and gospel are perfectly synonymous terms.

Or if the other part of the dilemma be taken, that eternal justice does not require, that every penitent be pardoned; who knows but that God may see fit, to suffer justice, in some instances, to take place? who will say that the other divine perfections are utterly inconsistent with justice? or that wisdom, goodness and justice cannot co-exist in the same character? or that the law of God is such that it cannot be executed in any instance, consistently with the divine character?\* These

\* That law in which Paul delighteth after the

would be bold assertions indeed : let him who avows them, at the same time prove them. Indeed he must either prove these assertions, or own that justice requires the pardon of every penitent, and abide the consequences ; or renounce the doctrine, that the divine perfections require that every penitent be pardoned without an atonement.\*

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## DISCOURSE II.

**HAVING**, in the preceding discourse, given an answer to the two inquiries proposed concerning the necessity, and the ground of the necessity

inward man ; which he declares to be holy, and just, and good ; to be glorious too, nay, in the abstract, glory : Rom. vii. and 2. Cor. iii. and which David pronounces to be perfect, and more desirable than gold, yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey and the honey comb. Psalm xix.

\* “ Arguments drawn from such considerations as those of the moral government of God, the nature of things, and the general plan of revelation, will not be put off to a future time. The whole compass and force of them is within our reach, and if the mind be unbiassed, they must, I think, determine our assent.”

Corruptions of christianity, vol. i. page 278.

of the atonement of Christ. I proceed to the third, which is,

III. Are we, notwithstanding the redemption of Christ, forgiven freely by grace? That we should be forgiven wholly through the redemption of Christ, and yet by free grace, hath, as I observed, appeared to many, a grand inconsistency, or a perplexing difficulty. In discoursing on this question, I shall,

1. Mention several modes in which attempts have been made to solve this difficulty. 2. I shall suggest some considerations which may possibly lead to the true solution.

First. I am to mention several modes, in which attempts have been made, to solve this difficulty.

1. Some allow that there is no exercise of grace in the bare pardon\* or justification of the sinner: that all the grace of the gospel consists in the gift of Christ; in providing an atonement;

\* The impropriety of expression, in speaking of pardon without grace, would need an apology, were it not common in treatises on this subject. No more is intended, than that the sinner is acquitted or released, without grace.



in the undertaking of Christ to make atonement, and in the actual making it. And as the pardon of the sinner is founded on those gracious actions ; so that in a more lax sense is also said to be an act of grace. As to this account of the matter, I have to observe—That it is rather yielding to the objection, than answering it. It is allowed, in this state of the matter, that the pardon of the sinner is properly no act of grace. But this seems not to be reconcileable with the plain declarations of scripture ; as in our text ; In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Rom. iii. 24. These and such like passages seem plainly to import, that pardon itself is an act of grace, and not merely that it is founded on other acts which are acts of grace. Besides the very idea of pardon or forgiveness implies grace. So not only is any crime pardoned, as it is pardoned graciously. To pardon a

crime on the footing of justice, in the proper sense of the word justice, is a direct contradiction.

Again ; it is not proper to say, that the pardon of the sinner is an act of grace, merely because it is founded on the gracious gift of Christ, and his gracious act in making atonement. It is not proper to say, that any act is an act of grace, merely because it is founded on another act, which is really an act of grace. As well we may say, that if a creditor, by a third person, furnish his debtor with money sufficient to discharge his debt, when the debtor has paid, in this way, the full debt, it is an act of grace in the creditor to give up the obligation. Whereas, who does not see that the furnishing of the money and the giving up of the obligation, are two distinct acts, and however the former is indeed an act of grace ; yet the latter is no more an act of grace, than if the money had been paid to some other creditor, and he had given up an obligation for the same sum. If it be an act of grace in the creditor, to deliver up a

obligation, for which he hath received the full sum, because the money paid was originally furnished by himself, then it would be consistent with justice in the creditor, to retain the obligation; after he has received the full sum for which it was given; or to reject the money, and cast the creditor into prison, though he tenders payment. But neither of these, I presume, will be pretended to be just.

2. Some have attempted to relieve the difficulty now under consideration; in this manner: they say, the pardon of the sinner is no act of grace to Christ, because he has paid the debt for the sinner: but that it is an act of grace to the sinner, because the debt was paid, not by the sinner himself, but by Christ. Nor was Christ so much as delegated by the sinner to pay his debt. Concerning this I observe, in the first place: that if the atonement of Christ be considered as the payment of a debt, the release of the sinner seems not to be an act of grace, although the payment be made by Christ, and not by the sinner

personally. Suppose any one of you owes a certain sum : he goes and pay the full sum himself personally. Doubtless all will agree, that the creditor, in this case, when he gives up the obligation, performs a mere act of justice, in which there is no grace at all. But in what respect would there have been more grace in giving up the obligation, if the money had been sent by a servant, by a friend, or by any third person ? Here I am sensible an objection will arise to this effect ; but we did not send the payment of our debt to God, by the hand of Christ as our friend : we did not delegate him to make atonement for us ; he was graciously appointed and given by God. To this I answer, that this objection places the whole grace of the gospel in providing the Savior, not in the pardon of sin. Besides, if by delegating Christ be meant such a sincere consent and earnest desire, that Christ should make atonement for us, as a man may have that his friend should discharge a debt in his behalf ; without doubt every

true christian, in this sense, delegates Christ to make atonement for his sins. Did not Abraham and all the saints who lived before the incarnation of Christ, and who were informed that atonement was to be made for them by Christ, sincerely consent to it, and earnestly desire it? And though now Christ has actually made atonement, yet every one who walks in the steps of the faith of Abraham, is the subject of the like sincere consent to the office and work of Christ, and the like earnest desire, that by his atonement, a reconciliation may be effected between God and himself. So that if Christ have, in the proper sense of the words, paid the debt for his people, his people do as truly send him to make this payment, as a man ever sends his friend to make payment to his creditor.

Nor is any thing wanting to make any man, or all men, in this sense, delegate Christ to make atonement for them, but the gift of repentance or a new heart. And if God had not prevented them by previously appointing Christ to the

work of redemption, all mankind being brought to repentance, and being informed that Christ, on their consent and delegation, would make atonement for their sins, would freely have given their consent, and delegated him to the work.

But what if the people of Christ did not, in any sense, delegate him to this work? would this cause the payment of their debt by Christ, to be at all more consistent with free grace in their discharge? Suppose a man without any delegation, consent, or knowledge of his friend, pays the full demand of his creditor, it is manifest, that the creditor is obliged in justice to discharge the debtor, equally as if the agent had acted by delegation from the debtor. Or if we had in every sense delegated and commissioned Christ, still our pardon would be an act of grace, as still we should be treated more favorably than our personal characters deserve.

Now to apply the whole of this to the subject before us: if Christ have, in the proper sense of the words, paid the debt which we owed to God, whether

by a delegation from us or not ; there can be no more grace in our discharge, than if we had paid it ourselves.

But the fact is, that Christ has not, in the literal and proper sense, paid the debt for us. It is indeed true, that our deliverance is called a redemption, which refers to the deliverance of a prisoner out of captivity, commonly effected by paying a certain sum as the price of his liberty. In the same strain, Christ is said to give himself a ransom for many, and christians are said to be bought with a price, &c. All which scripture expressions bring into view the payment of money, or the discharge of a debt. But it is to be remembered, that these are metaphorical expressions, therefore not literally and exactly true. We had not deprived God of his property : we had not robbed the treasury of heaven. God was possessed of as much property after the fall as before : the universe and the fulness thereof still remained to be his. Therefore when Christ made satisfaction for us, he refunded no property. As none had been taken away, none

needed to be refunded. But we had rebelled against God, we had practically despised his law and authority, and it was necessary, that his authority should be supported, and that it should be made to appear, that sin shall not go without proper tokens of divine displeasure and abhorrence ; that God will maintain his law ; that his authority and government shall not be suffered to fall into contempt ; and that God is a friend to virtue and holiness, and an irreconcilable enemy to transgression, sin and vice. These things were necessary to be made manifest, and the clear manifestation of these things, if we will use the term, was the debt which was due to God. This manifestation was made in the sufferings and death of Christ. But Christ did not, in the literal sense, pay the debt we owed to God ; if he had paid it, all grace would have been excluded from the pardon of the sinner. Therefore,

3. Others seeing clearly that these solutions of the difficulty are not satisfactory, have said, that the atonement of Christ consisted, not in the payment of



a debt, but in the vindication of the divine law and character : that Christ made this vindication, by practically declaring the justice of the law, in his active obedience, and by submitting to the penalty of it, in his death : that as what Christ did and suffered in the flesh, was a declaration of the rectitude of the divine law and character, so it was a declaration of the evil of sin ; and the greater the evil of sin appears to be, the greater the grace of pardon appears to be. Therefore the atonement of Christ is so far from diminishing the grace of pardon, that it magnifies it. The sum of this is, that since the atonement consists, not in the payment of a debt, but in the vindication of the divine law and character ; therefore it is not at all opposed to free grace in pardon.

Concerning this stating of the matter, I beg leave to observe ; that if by a vindication of the divine law and character, be meant, proof given that the law of God is just, and that the divine character is good and irreproachable ; I can by no means suppose, that the atonement

consisted in a vindication of the law and character of God. The law is no more proved to be just, and the character of God is no more proved to be good, by the perfect obedience and death of Christ, than the same things are proved by the perfect obedience of the angels, and by the torments of the damned. But I shall have occasion to enlarge on this point by and by.

Again ; if by vindication of the divine law and character, be meant, proof given that God is determined to support the authority of his law, and that he will not suffer it to fall into contempt ; that he will also support his own dignity, will act a consistent part in legislation and in the execution of his law, and will not be disobeyed with impunity, or without proper satisfaction : I grant, that by Christ the divine law and character are vindicated ; so that God can now consistently with his own honor, and the authority of his law, forgive the sinner. But how does this make it appear that there is any grace in the pardon of the sinner, when Christ as his substitute,

hath made full atonement for him, by vindicating the law and character of God? what if the sinner himself, instead of Christ, had by obedience and suffering, vindicated the law and character of God; and in consequence had been released from farther punishment? Would his release in this case, have been by grace, or by justice? Doubtless by the latter and not by the former: for "to him that worketh, is the reward reckoned, not of grace, but of debt." Rom. iv. 4. Therefore why is it not equally an act of justice, to release the sinner, in consequence of the same vindication made by Christ? Payment of debt equally precludes grace, when made by a third person, as when made by the debtor himself. And since the vindication of the divine law and character, made by the sinner himself, precludes grace from the release of the sinner; why does not the same vindication as effectually preclude it, when made by a third person?

Those authors who give us this solution of the difficulty under consideration,

seem to suppose that it is a sufficient solution to say that the atonement consists, not in the payment of debt, but in the vindication of the divine law and character ; and what they say, seems to imply, that however or by whomsoever, that vindication be made, whether by the sinner himself, or any other person, it is not at all opposed to the exercise of grace in the release of the sinner. Whereas it appears by the text just now quoted and by many others, that if that vindication were made by the sinner himself, it would shut out all grace from his release. And I presume this will be granted by those authors themselves, on a little reflection. To say otherwise, is to say, that though a sinner should endure the curse of the law, yet there would be grace in his subsequent release—it seems then that the grace of pardon depends, not barely on this, that the atonement consists in a vindication of the law and character of God ; but upon this particular circumstance attending the vindication, that it be made by a third person. And if this circumstance will

leave room for grace in the release of the sinner, why is there not as much grace in the release of the sinner, though the atonement of Christ be a payment of the sinner's debt: since the payment is attended with the same important and decisive circumstance, that it is made by a third person?

*Objection.* But we could not vindicate the law and character of God; therefore it is absurd to make the supposition, and to draw consequences from the supposition, that we had made such a vindication.

*Answer.* It is no more absurd to make this supposition, than it is to make the supposition, that we had paid the debt to divine justice; for we could no more do this than we could make the vindication in question. And if it follows from this circumstance, that we neither have vindicated nor could vindicate the divine character, that our release from condemnation is an act of grace; why does it not also follow from the circumstance, that we neither have paid nor could pay the debt to divine justice,

that our release is an act of grace, even on the supposition, that Christ has in the literal sense paid the debt for us?

Thus, not any of these modes of solving this grand difficulty, appears to be satisfactory. Even this last, which seemed to bid the fairest to afford satisfaction, fails. Therefore,

Secondly. I shall suggest some considerations, which may possibly lead to the true solution. The question before us, is, whether pardon through the atonement of Christ be an act of justice or of grace. In order to a proper answer to this question, it is of primary importance, that we have clear and determinate ideas affixed to the words justice and grace.

I find the word *justice* to be used in three distinct senses: sometimes it means commutative justice, sometimes distributive justice, and sometimes what may be called general or public justice.

Commutative justice respects property and matters of commerce solely, and secures to every man his own property:

To treat a man justly in this sense, is not to deprive him of his property, and whenever it falls into our hands, to restore it duly, or to make due payment of debts. In one word, commutative justice is to violate no man's property.

Distributive justice consists in properly rewarding virtue or good conduct, and punishing crimes or vicious conduct; and it has respect to a man's personal moral character or conduct. To treat a man justly in this sense, is to treat him according to his personal character or conduct. Commutative justice in the recovery of debts, has no respect at all to the character or conduct of the debtor, but merely to the property of the creditor. Distributive justice in the punishment of crimes, has no respect at all to the property of the criminal; but merely to his personal conduct: unless his property may, in some instances, enhance his crimes.

General or public justice comprehends all moral goodness: and though the word is often used in this sense, it is really an improper use of it. In this

sense, whatever is right, is said to be just, or an act of justice; and whatever is wrong or improper to be done, is said to be unjust, or an act of injustice. To practise justice in this sense, is to practise agreeably to the dictates of general benevolence, or to seek the glory of God and the good of the universe. And whenever the glory of God is neglected, it may be said, that God is injured or deprived of his right. Whenever the general good is neglected or impeded, the universe may be said to suffer an injury. For instance: if Paul were now to be cast down from heaven, to suffer the pains of hell, it would be wrong, as it would be inconsistent with God's covenant faithfulness, with the designed exhibition of his glorious grace, and with the good of the universe. In this sense, it would not be just. Yet in the sense of distributive justice, such a treatment of Paul would be perfectly just, as it would be no more than correspondent to his personal demerits.

The term *grace*, comes now to be explained. Grace is ever so opposed to



justice, that they mutually limit each other. Wherever grace begins, justice ends; and wherever justice begins, grace ends. Grace as opposed to commutative justice is gratuitously to relinquish your property or to forgive a man his debt. And commutative injustice is to demand more of a man, than your own property. Grace as opposed to justice in the distributive sense, is to treat a man more favorably or mildly, than is correspondent to his personal character or conduct. To treat him unjustly is to use him with greater severity, than is correspondent to his personal character. It is to be remembered, that in personal character I include punishment endured, as well as actions performed. When a man has broken any law, and has afterwards suffered the penalty of that law; as he has, by the transgression, treated the law with contempt, so by suffering the penalty, he has supported the authority of it: and the latter makes a part of his personal character, as he stands related to that law, as really as the former.

With regard to the third kind of justice, as this is improperly called justice, and as it comprehends all moral goodness, it is not at all opposed to grace; but comprehends that, as well as every other virtue, as truth, faithfulness, meekness, forgiveness, patience, prudence, temperance, fortitude, &c. All these are right and fit, and the contrary tempers or practices are wrong, and injurious to God and the system: and therefore in this sense of justice are unjust. And even grace itself, which is favor to the ill-deserving, so far as it is wise and proper to be exercised, makes but a part of this kind of justice.

We proceed now to apply these explanations to the solution of the difficulty under consideration. The question is this, is the pardon of the sinner, through the atonement of Christ, an act of justice or of grace? To which I answer, that with respect to commutative justice, it is neither an act of justice nor of grace. Because commutative justice is not concerned in the affair. We neither owed money to the deity, nor did Christ pay

any on our behalf. His atonement is not a payment of our debt. If it had been, our discharge would have been an act of mere justice, and not of grace. To make the sinner also pay the debt, which had been already paid by Christ, would be manifestly injurious, oppressive, and beyond the bounds of commutative justice, the rule of which is, that every man retain and recover his own property, and that only. But a debt being paid, by whomsoever it be paid, the creditor has recovered his property, and therefore has a right to nothing further. If he extort, or attempt to extort, any thing further, he proceeds beyond his right and is guilty of injustice. So that if Christ has paid the debt for the believer, he would be discharged, not on the footing of grace, but of strict justice.

With respect to distributive justice, the discharge of the sinner is wholly an act of grace. This kind of justice had respect solely to the personal character and conduct of its object. And then is a man treated justly, when he is treated

according to his personal moral character. If he be treated more favorably than is correspondent to his personal character, he is the object of grace. I say personal character ; for distributive justice has no respect to the character of a third person, or to any thing which may be done or suffered by another person, than by him, who is the object of this justice, or who is on trial, to be rewarded or punished. And with regard to the case now before us, what if Christ has made atonement for sin ? This atonement constitutes no part of the personal character of the sinner : but his personal character is essentially the same, as it would have been, if Christ had made no atonement. And as the sinner, in pardon, is treated, not only more favorably, but infinitely more favorably, than is correspondent to his personal character, his pardon is wholly an act of infinite grace. If it were, in the sense of distributive justice, an act of justice : he would be injured, if a pardon were refused him. But as the case is, he would not be injured, though a pardon were refused

him ; because he would not be treated more unfavorably than is correspondent to his personal character.

Therefore though it be true, that if a third person pay a debt, there would be no grace exercised by the creditor, in discharging the debtor, yet when a third person atones for a crime, by suffering in the stead of a criminal, there is entire grace in the discharge of the criminal, and distributive justice still allows him to be punished in his own person. The reason is, what I have mentioned already, that justice in punishing crimes, respects the personal character only of the criminal : but in the payment of debts, it respects the recovery of property only. In the former case, it admits of any treatment which is according to his personal character : in the latter, it admits of nothing beyond the recovery of property.

So that though Christ has made complete atonement for the sins of all his disciples, and they are justified wholly through his redemption ; yet they are justified wholly by grace. Because they personally have not made atonement for

their sins, or suffered the curse of the law. Therefore they have no claim to a discharge on account of their own personal conduct and suffering. And if it is objected, that neither is a debtor discharged on account of any thing which he hath done personally, when he is discharged on the payment of his debt by a third person : yet justice does not admit, that the creditor recover the debt again from the debtor himself : why then does it admit, that a magistrate inflict the punishment of a crime on the criminal himself, when atonement has been made by a substitute ? The answer is, that justice in these two cases is very different, and respects very different objects. In criminal causes, it respects the personal conduct or character of the criminal, and admits of any treatment which is correspondent to that conduct. In civil causes, or matters of debt, it respects the restitution of property only, and this being made, it admits of no further demand.

In the third sense of justice before explained, according to which any thing

is just, which is right and best to be done ; the pardon of the sinner is entirely an act of justice. It is undoubtedly most conducive to the divine glory, and general good of the created system, that every believer should be pardoned ; and therefore, in the present sense of the word, it is an act of justice. The pardon of the sinner is equally an act of justice, if, as some suppose, he be pardoned not on account of the death of Christ, considered as an equivalent to the curse of the law denounced against the sinner ; but merely on account of the positive obedience of Christ. If this be the mode and the condition of pardon established by God, doubtless pardon granted in this mode and on this condition, is most conducive to the divine glory and the general good. Therefore it is, in the sense of justice now under consideration, an act of justice ; insomuch that if pardon were not granted in this mode, the divine glory would be tarnished, and the general good diminished, or the universe would suffer an injury. The same would be

true, if God had in fact granted pardon, without any atonement, whether by suffering or obedience. We might have argued from that fact, that infinite wisdom saw it to be most conducive to the divine glory and the general good, to pardon without an atonement; and of course that if pardon had not been granted in this way, both the divine glory and the general good, would have been diminished, and injustice would have been done to the universe. In the same sense the gift of Christ, to be our Savior, his undertaking to save us, and every other gift of God to his creatures, are acts of justice. But it must be remembered, that this is an improper sense of the word justice, and is not at all opposed to grace, but implies it. For all those divine acts and gifts just mentioned, though in this sense they are acts of justice, yet are at the same time, acts of pure grace.

In this sense of justice, the word seems to be used by the apostle Paul, Rom. iii. 26. "To declare his righteousness, (or justice,) that he might be



just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." That God might be just to himself and to the universe. Again in Psalm lxxxv. 10. "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace, have kissed each other." Righteousness, in the distributive sense, hath not kissed peace with respect to the sinner; but so far as it speaks any thing, calls for his punishment. But the public good, and the divine glory admit of peace with the sinner. In the same sense the word occurs in the version of the Psalms in common use among us, where it is said "justice is pleased and peace is given." Again in the catechism of the assembly of divines, where they say, "Christ offered up himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice."

Thus it appears, that the pardon of the sinner, in reference to distributive justice, which is the only proper sense of the word, with respect to this matter, is entirely an act of grace, and that although he is pardoned wholly through the redemption of Jesus Christ.

It is in the same sense an act of grace,

as the gift of Christ, or any other most gracious act of God. Though the sinner is pardoned wholly through the redemption of Christ, yet his pardon is an act of pure grace, because in it he is treated inconceivably more favorably than is correspondent to his personal character.

The pardon of the sinner, on this plan of the redemption or the atonement of Christ, is as entirely an act of grace, as if it had been granted on an atonement made, not by the sufferings of Christ, but merely by his active obedience. For if we suppose, that the atonement of Christ consists wholly in the obedience of Christ, not in his sufferings, in what sense would the pardon of the sinner be an act of grace, in which it is not an act of grace, on the hypothesis concerning the atonement which hath been now stated? Pardon is no more procured by the payment of the sinner's debt, in the one case, than in the other. If it be said that Christ's suffering the curse of the law is the payment of the debt; I answer, this is no

more a payment of the debt, than the obedience of Christ. If it be said, that Christ's obedience only honors and magnifies the law ; I answer, no more is done by the sufferings of Christ. It is true, that if the sinner be pardoned on account of Christ's obedience, he is treated more favorably than is correspondent to his personal character. The same is true, if he be pardoned on account of Christ's sufferings. If it be said, that in the one case, Christ suffers, as the substitute of the sinner ; I answer, in the other case, he obeys as the substitute of the sinner. In the one case, Christ has by his sufferings made it consistent with the general good, to pardon the sinner ; in the other case, he hath made the same thing consistent with the general good, by his obedience. And if this circumstance, that the pardon of the sinner is consistent with the general good, abolishes grace from his pardon in the one case, the same circumstance is productive of the same effect, in the other. The truth is, that in both cases, the whole grace of pardon consists

in this, and this only, that the sinner is treated infinitely more favorably, than is correspondent to his personal character.

Again ; according to this scheme of the atonement, the pardon of the sinner, is as wholly an act of grace, as if he had been pardoned without any atonement at all. If the sinner had been pardoned without any atonement, he would have been treated more favorably than is correspondent to his own character : so he is, when pardoned through the atonement of Christ. In the former case, he would be pardoned, without a payment of his debt : so he is in the latter. If the measures taken by God, to secure the public good, those measures consisting neither in any personal doing or suffering of the sinner, nor in the payment of debt, be inconsistent with grace in the pardon of the sinner, in the one case ; doubtless whatever measures are taken by God, to secure the public good in the other case, are equally inconsistent with grace in pardon. And no man will pretend, that if God do pardon the sinner without an

atonement, he will pardon him in a way which is inconsistent with the public good. In this view of the objection, either the bare circumstance that the pardon of the sinner is consistent with the public good, is that which abolishes the grace of pardon ; or it is the particular mode, in which the consistence of pardon and the public good, is brought about. If the bare circumstance of the consistence of pardon and the public good, be that which abolishes the grace of pardon ; then it seems, that in order that any pardon may be gracious, it must be inconsistent with the public good : and therefore the pardon of the sinner without any atonement, being by the concession of the objector, a gracious act, is inconsistent with the general good of the universe, and with the glory and perfections of God, and therefore can never be granted by God, as long as he is possessed of infinite perfection and goodness, whereby he is necessarily disposed to seek the good of the universal system, or of his own kingdom.

Or if it be said, that it is the particu-

lar mode, in which the consistence between pardon and the public good is brought about, which abolishes the grace of pardon; in this case it is incumbent on the objector, to point out what there is in the mode, which is opposed to grace in pardon. He cannot pretend, that in this mode, the debt of the sinner is paid, or that in repentance the sinner's personal character is so altered, that he now deserves no punishment. If this were the case, there would certainly be no grace in his pardon. It is no grace, and no pardon, not to punish a man who deserves no punishment. If the objector were to hold, that the personal character of the sinner is so altered by repentance, that he no longer deserves punishment, he would at once confute his own scheme of gracious pardon.

Neither can it be pretended, by the advocates for pardon without atonement, that there is any grace in pardon, in any other view than this, that the sinner is treated more favorably, than is correspondent to his personal character. And

There would not have been more grace manifested towards the sinner, if his pardon had not been granted, without any atonement: I answer, by no means; because to put the question in this sense, is the same as to ask, whether the favor of pardon granted without an atonement, would not be greater in comparison with the sinner's personal character, than it is when granted on account of the atonement of Christ. Or whether there would not have been a greater distance between the good of pardon, and the demerit of the sinner's personal character, if his pardon had been granted without an atonement, than if it be granted on account of the atonement of Christ. But the good, the safety, the indemnity of pardon, or of deliverance from condemnation, is the very same, in whatever way it be granted, whether through an atonement or not, whether in a way of grace or in a way of debt, whether from a regard to the merits of Christ, or the merits of the sinner himself. Again, the personal character of the sinner is also the same, whether he

be pardoned through an atonement or not. If his pardon be granted without an atonement, it makes not the demerit of his personal character and conduct the greater: or if it be granted on account of the atonement of Christ, it makes not the demerit of his personal character the less. Therefore as the good of pardon is the same, in whatever way it be granted; and the personal character of the sinner pardoned is the same; the distance between the good of pardon, and the demerit of the sinner's character is also the same, whether he be pardoned on account of the atonement of Christ, or absolutely, without any atonement. Of course the pardon of the sinner is not an act of greater grace to him personally, if granted without regard to any atonement, than if granted from regard to the atonement of Christ.

But perhaps the meaning of the question stated above, is, Whether, if the sinner had been pardoned, without an atonement, it would not have exhibited greater grace, in the divine mind, or



greater goodness in God ; and whether ; in this mode of pardon, greater good would not have accrued to the universe. The answer to this question wholly depends on the necessity of an atonement, which I have endeavored briefly to show, in the preceding discourse. If an atonement be necessary to support the authority of the law and of the moral government of God, it is doubtless necessary to the public good of the moral system, or to the general good of the universe and to the divine glory. This being granted or established, the question just now stated, comes to this simply, whether it exhibits greater grace and goodness in the divine mind, and secures greater good to the universe, to pardon sin in such a mode, as is consistent with the general good of the universe ; or in such a mode as is inconsistent with that important object : a question which no man, from regard to his own reputation, would choose to propose.

## DISCOURSE III.

HAVING, in the preceding discourses, considered the particulars at first proposed, which were, that we can obtain forgiveness, in no other way, than through the redemption of Christ; the reason or ground of this mode of forgiveness; and the consistency between the complete atonement of Christ, and free grace in forgiveness; the way is prepared for the following inferences and reflections.

If the atonement of Christ be a substitute for the punishment of the sinner according to the divine law, and were designed to support the authority of that law, equally as the punishment of hell; then we may infer, that the atonement of Christ does not consist in shewing, that the divine law is just. With regard to this, I venture to assert two things: that the obedience and death of Christ do not prove, that the divine law is just; that if they did prove this, still merely by that circumstance they would make no atonement.

1. The obedience and death of Christ do not prove, that the divine law is a just law. The sufferings of Christ no more prove this, than the punishment of the damned proves it. The former are the substitute of the latter, and were designed for substance to prove and exhibit the same truths, and to answer the same ends. But who will say that the torments of the damned prove the justice of the divine law? No more is this proved by the sufferings of Christ. If the justice of the divine law be called in question, the justice and moral perfection of God is of course equally called in question. This being the case, whatever he can say, whether by obedience or suffering, to testify the justice of the law, must be considered as the testimony of a party in his own cause; and also as the testimony of a Being whose integrity is as much disputed, as the justice of the law. It cannot therefore be received as proof in the case. The testimony of God, whether given in obedience or suffering, so long as his character is disputed, as

it will be, so long as the justice of his law is disputed; proves neither that the law is just, in reality, nor that it is so in his own estimation. A being of a disputed character may be supposed to testify, both contrary to reality, and contrary to his own knowledge. And as the character of the deity is disputed, by those who dispute the justice of the divine law; so there is the same foundation to dispute the character and testimony of the Son of God. Therefore the obedience and death of Christ do not prove, that the divine law is just.

2. If the obedience and death of Christ did prove that the law is just; still by this circumstance, they would make no atonement for sin. If it were a truth, that the obedience and death of Christ did prove the divine law to be just, and merely on that account made atonement, the ground of this truth would be, that whatever makes it manifest that the law is just, makes atonement. The essence of the atonement, on this hypothesis, is placed in the manifestation of the justice of the divine

law. Therefore this manifestation, however, or by whomsoever it be made, is an atonement. But as the law is really just, it was doubtless in the power of infinite wisdom to manifest the justice of it, to rational creatures, without either the obedience or the death of Christ, or of any other person. If it were not in the power of infinite wisdom to manifest the justice of the divine law, without the death of Christ; then if Christ had not died, but all men had perished according to the law, it never would have appeared that the law is just. But bare attention to the law itself, to the reason, ground, and necessity of it, especially when this attention is excited, and the powers of the mind are aided, by even such a divine influence, as God does in fact sometimes give to men of the most depraved characters; is sufficient to convince of the justice of the law. But there can be no dispute, whether the sanctifying and savingly illuminating influences of the spirit of God, without the obedience and death of Christ, would convince any man of the justice

of the law. We have no more reason to dispute this, than to dispute, whether the angels who kept their first estate, did believe the justice of the law, before they were informed of the incarnation and death of Christ. According to this hypothesis, therefore, all that was necessary to make atonement for mankind, was to communicate to them satisfying grace, or to lead them to repentance: and as to Christ, he is dead in vain.

Besides; if the obedience and death of Christ did ever so credibly manifest the justice of the law, what atonement, what satisfaction for sin, would this make? How would this support the authority of the law? How would this make it to appear, that the transgressor may expect the most awful consequences from his transgression? or that transgression is infinitely abominable in the sight of God? And how would the manifestation of the justice of the law, tend to restrain men from transgressing that law? Whatever the effect of such manifestation may be on the minds of those innocent creatures, who have re-

gard to justice or moral rectitude ; yet on the minds of those who are disposed to transgress, and have lost the proper sense of moral rectitude, the manifestation would have no effectual tendency to restrain them from transgression : therefore would in no degree answer the ends of the punishment threatened in the law, nor be any atonement for sin.

Perhaps some may suppose, that what hath now been asserted, that the death or atonement of Christ does not prove the justice of God and of his law, is inconsistent with what hath been repeatedly suggested in the preceding discourses, that it is an end of the death or atonement of Christ, to manifest how hateful sin is to God. If the death of Christ manifests God's hatred of sin, it seems, that the same event must also manifest God's love of holiness and justice. In answer to this, I observe ; that the death of Christ manifests God's hatred of sin and love of holiness, in the same sense as the damnation of the wicked manifests these, viz. on the supposition that the divine law is just and

holy. If it be allowed the divine law is just and holy, then every thing done to support and execute that law, is a declaration in favor of holiness and against sin; or a declaration of God's love of holiness and of his hatred of iniquity. Both the punishment of the damned, and the death of Christ declare God's hatred of all transgressions of his law. And if that law be holy, to hate the transgressions of it, is to hate sin, and at the same time to love holiness. But if the law be not holy, no such consequence will follow: it cannot, on that supposition, be inferred from the divine hatred of transgression, that God either hates sin or loves holiness.

Again; we may infer from the preceding doctrine, that the atonement of Christ does not consist essentially in his active or positive obedience. By atonement I mean that which, as a substitute for the punishment which is threatened in the law, supports the authority of that law, and the dignity of the divine government. But the obedience of Christ, even in the most trying circumstances,



without any tokens of the divine displeasure against the transgressors of the law, would never support the authority of the law, and the dignity of the divine government. It by no means makes it appear, that it is an evil and bitter thing to violate the law, and that the violation of it deserves, and may be expected to be followed with most awful consequences to him, who dares to violate it. A familiar example may illustrate this matter. It is the rule or law of a certain family, that a particular child shall steadily attend the school kept in the neighborhood, and that if he absent himself for a day, without license, he shall feel the rod. However, after some time, the child being weary of observing this law, does absent himself, and spend the day in play. At night the father being informed of it, arraigns the child, finds him guilty, and prepares to inflict the punishment, which he had threatened. At this instant, the brother of the offending child intercedes, acknowledges the reasonableness of the law, which his brother had transgressed, confesses that

he deserves the penalty, but offers himself to make satisfaction for his brother's offense. Being interrogated by what means he expects to make satisfaction ; he answers, by going himself to school the next day. Now can any one suppose, that in this way the second child can make satisfaction for the offense of the first ? Or that if the father were to accept the proposal, he would find the authority of his law, and the government of his family supported with dignity ? Or that the offending child, or the other children of the family, would by this mean be effectually deterred from future offenses of the like nature ? And however trying the circumstances of going to school may be, if those circumstances be no token of the father's displeasure at the disobedient child's transgression ; still the going to school of the second child, will not make the least satisfaction for the offense of the first. -

I venture to say further, That not only did not the atonement of Christ consist essentially in his active obedience, but that his active obedience was

part of his atonement properly so called, nor essential to it. The perfect obedience of Christ was doubtless necessary in order to the due execution of his prophetic and priestly office ; in order to his intercession : and also in order that the salvation of his disciples might be a reward of his obedience. But that it was necessary to support the authority of the divine law in the pardon of sinners, does not appear. If Christ himself could possibly have been a sinner, and had first made satisfaction for his own sin ; it does not appear, but that afterwards he might also satisfy for the sins of his people. If the pretender to the crown of Great Britain, should engage war against king George, in the course of the war should be taken, could be brought to trial, and be condemned to the block ; will any man say that the king of France, by becoming a substitute of the pretender, and offering in his stead, could not make atonement for the pretender, so as effectually to support the authority of the British laws and government, and dis-

courage all future groundless pretensions to the British crown? Yet the king of France could plead no perfect obedience to the British laws. Even the sinner himself, but upon the supposition of the infinite evil of sin, could by his own sufferings, atone for his sins. Yet he could not exhibit a perfect obedience.

Besides; if the bare obedience of Christ have made atonement, why could not the repentance and perfect obedience of Christ's people themselves, have answered, instead of the obedience of Christ? Doubtless if they had suffered the penalty of the divine law, it would have answered to support the authority of the law, and the vigor of the divine government, as really as the death of Christ. And since the eternal suffering of the people of Christ, would have answered the same end of supporting the authority of the law, as the suffering of Christ; why would not the eternal perfect repentance and obedience of the people of Christ, have answered the same end, as his obedience in their behalf? If it would, both the death and

obedience of Christ as our substitute, is entirely in vain. If the elect had really been converted, and made perfectly and perseveringly obedient, it could have answered every purpose both of the death and obedience of Christ. Or if the obedience of Christ in the flesh were at all necessary, it was not necessary to support the authority of the law and government of God ; but merely as it was most wise, that he should obey. It was necessary in the same sense only, as that the wind should, at this moment, blow from the north-east, and not from the south-west, or from any other quarter.

If the mere active obedience of Christ have made atonement for sin, it may be difficult to account for the punishment of any sinners. If obedience without any demonstration of divine displeasure at sin, will answer every purpose of the divine authority and government, in some instances, why not in all instances ? and if the obedience of sinners themselves will answer as really as that of Christ, why might not all men have

been led by divine grace to repentance and perfect subsequent obedience, and in that way been saved from the curse of the law? Doubtless they might: nor was there originally, nor is there now without any consideration of the atonement of Christ, any other necessity of the punishment of any of mankind according to the law, than that which results from mere sovereign wisdom in which sense indeed it was necessary that Christ should be given to be the Savior of sinners, that Paul should be saved, and that every other event should take place, just as it does take place.

From our doctrine we also learn the great gain which accrues to the universe by the death of Christ. It hath been objected to the idea of atonement now exhibited, that if the death of Christ be an equivalent to the curse of the law which was to have been inflicted on all his people; then there is on the whole no gain, no advantage to the universe, that all that punishment from which christians are saved, hath been suffered by Christ, and therefore that there is just

as much misery and no more happiness, than there would have been, had Christ not died. To this I answer,

1. That it is not true, that Christ endured an equal quantity of misery, to that which would have been endured by all his people, had they suffered the curse of the law. This was not necessary on account of the infinite dignity of his person. If a king were to condemn his son to lose an ear or a hand, it would doubtless be esteemed by all his subjects, a proof of far greater displeasure in the king, than if he should order some mean criminal to the gallows: and it would tend more effectually to support the authority of the law, for the violation of which, this punishment should be inflicted on the prince.

2. That if it were true, that Christ endured the very same quantity of misery, which was due to all his people; still by his death an infinite gain accrues to the universe. For though the misery, on this supposition, is in both cases the same, and balances itself; yet the positive happiness obtained by the death of

Christ, infinitely exceeds that which was lost by Christ. As the eternal *Logos* was capable of neither enduring misery, nor losing happiness, all the happiness lost by the substitution of Christ, was barely that of the *man* Christ Jesus, during only thirty-three years ; or rather during the three last years of his life : because it does not appear, but that during the rest of his life he was as happy, as men in general, and enjoyed as much or more good, than he suffered evil. But the happiness gained by the substitution of Christ, is that of a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, kindreds, and people and tongues ; Rev. vii. 9. Now if the happiness of one man for three years, or at most for thirty-three years, be equal to that of an innumerable multitude throughout eternity, with the addition of the greater happiness, which Christ himself must enjoy now that he has brought so many sons to glory, beyond what he would have enjoyed, if all these had been plunged in inconceivable and endless misery : then it may



be justly said, on the present hypothesis, that by the substitution of Christ, no advantage is gained to the universe. But if the latter infinitely exceed the former, the gain to the universe, even on the supposition, that the sufferings of Christ were equal to those, to which all his people were exposed, is infinite.

I may also hence take occasion to oppose an opinion which appears to me erroneous; which is, That the perfect obedience of Christ was in a great measure designed, to show us, that the divine law may be obeyed by men. It shows indeed, that it may be obeyed by a man in personal union with the divine nature. But how does this show, that it may be obeyed by a mere man? If we should also allow, that it shows, that a man born into the world in perfect innocence, and who is not a fallen creature, may obey the law: yet how does this prove, that it may be obeyed by a fallen creature, dead in trespasses and sins? It is an undoubted truth, that there is no inability in men to obey the law, except that which is of a moral nature, consisting

in the disinclination or disaffection of their own hearts; which does not in the least excuse them in their disobedience. But this is manifest by other considerations, than the perfect obedience of Christ; if it were not, it would not be manifest at all.

Another remark which naturally offers itself in discoursing on this subject is, that Christ's obedience of the precepts of the law, without submitting to the curse, would by no means prove the justice of that curse. This is the idea of some: that God sent his Son into the world, to obey the precepts of the law, and that his mere obedience of these, proves the justice both of the precepts and of the penalty of the law. I have already given the reasons by which I am made to believe, that the obedience of Christ does not prove the precepts of the law to be just. But if it did prove the precepts to be just, it would not therefore prove the penalty too to be just. As the precept of any law may be just and reasonable, yet may be enforced by a penalty which is unjust and cruel;

so the proof that the precept is just, does not at all prove, but that the penalty may be unjust and cruel. Indeed as the penalty of any law is 'designed to support and enforce the precept of that law, so to prove the justice of the penalty, proves the justice of the precept : because not the slightest penalty can be just, when applied to enforce an unjust precept. But this rule when inverted, doth not hold good. To prove the justice of a precept does by no means prove the justice of the penalty by which that precept is enforced. So that if Christ have proved the precepts of the divine law to be just, this by no means infers the justice of its penalty. On the other hand : if Christ came to prove the justice of the law, and all that he has done to this effect, have an immediate reference to the precepts only ; and if he have done nothing to establish the justice of the penal part, considered by itself ; the aspect of the whole will be, that the penal part is unjustifiable, and that for this reason he did not pretend to justify it.

The subject which hath been under

our consideration, also shews us, in what sense the sufferings of Christ were agreeable to God. It has been said, that it is incredible, that mere pain should be agreeable to a God of infinite goodness ; that therefore the sufferings of Christ were agreeable to God only as a proof of the strength of the virtue of Christ, or of his disposition to obey the divine law. If by mere pain be meant pain abstracted from the obedience of Christ, I cannot see why it may not be agreeable to God. It certainly is, in the damned : and for the same reason might have been, and doubtless was, in the case of our Lord. The Father was pleased with the pains of his Son, as they were necessary to support the authority of his law and government, in the salvation of sinners.

Another reflection naturally suggested by this subject is, that in punishing some sinners according to the curse of the law, and in requiring an adequate atonement, in order to the salvation of others ; God acts, not from any contracted, selfish motives, but from the

most noble benevolence and regard to the public good. It hath often and long since been made a matter of objection to the doctrines of the future punishment of the wicked, and of the atonement of Christ; that they represent the deity as having regard merely to his own honor and dignity, and not to the good of his creatures, and therefore represent him as deficient in goodness. But can it be pretended to be a proof of goodness in God, to suffer his own law, which is the perfect rule of virtue, to fall into contempt? However it might afford relief to some individuals, if God were to suffer his moral kingdom to be dissolved; can it be for the general good of the system of his creatures? Is it not manifestly necessary to the general good of the created system, that God's moral kingdom be upholden? and that therefore the authority of the divine law, and vigor of the divine government be maintained? If so, then it is also necessary to the general good, that punishments be inflicted on the disobedient and lawless; or that they be pardoned

in consequence only of a proper satisfaction, or atonement.

So that those very doctrines which of all others are made matter of the most objection to the divine goodness or benevolence, are clear proofs of goodness, and are absolutely necessary to it. If a prince should either make no laws for the government of his subjects, or should never execute them : but should suffer all crimes to pass with impunity : you would by no means esteem him a good prince, aiming at the good of his subjects : you would not hesitate to pronounce him either very weak or very wicked.

In reflecting on this subject, we may notice the reason, why so many, who profess to be advocates for the doctrine of atonement, yet place the atonement in that, in which it does by no means consist. The principal reason seems to be, that they have conceived, that the idea of Christ's having suffered an equivalent to the punishment, to which all his people were exposed, is inconsistent with grace in their pardon. But

If I have been so happy as properly to state the ideas of justice and grace, it appears that there is as much grace in the pardon of sinners on account of such an atonement as that just mentioned, as there would be on account of an atonement consisting in mere obedience ; or as there would be in pardon without any atonement at all.

Hence also we see, that the death of Christ in our stead, is not useless or in vain. The opposers of Christ's substitution and atonement, assert, that no good end is answered by the sufferings of an innocent, amiable and virtuous person, in the stead of the guilty. But surely to support the authority of the law and of the moral government of God, is not a vain or unimportant end. It was not in vain that Zaleucus, having made a law, that all adulterers should have both their eyes put out, and his own son being the first who transgressed, put out one of his own eyes and one of his son's. Hereby he spared his son in part, and yet as effectually supported the authority of his law, as if it had been

literally executed. Nor was it in vain that during the late war, a soldier in the American army of a robust constitution pitying his fellow soldier of a slender constitution, who was condemned to receive a certain number of stripes, petitioned to be put in the place of the criminal, and actually received the stripes.\* For the authority of the martial law was effectually supported, and perhaps by this mean, the life or future health and service of the criminal were preserved, and would otherwise have been lost.

Neither was the death of Christ in the stead of sinners, any injury done to an innocent person. As well may we say that Zaleucus, or the soldier just mentioned, were injured : or that a man is injured, when another man receives the money of him, which he voluntarily tenders in payment of the debt of a third person : or that a man is injured by the surgeon, who takes off his leg to preserve his life, the man himself consenting, and desiring him so to do.

\* This I am informed was a real fact.



Again ; we may observe in what sense justice and the divine law are satisfied by the death of Christ ; and in what sense the atonement of Christ is properly called a satisfaction. It is only the third kind of justice before mentioned, that is satisfied by Christ. No man for the reasons already given, will pretend that commutative justice is satisfied by Christ ; for the controversy between God and the sinner is not concerning property. Nor is distributive justice satisfied. If it were, there would indeed be no more grace in the discharge of the sinner, than there is in the discharge of a criminal, when he hath endured the full punishment, to which according to law, he hath been condemned. If distributive justice were satisfied, it would have no further claim on the sinner. And to punish him, when this kind of justice has no claim on him, is to treat him more unfavorably or severely than his personal character deserves. If so, the penitent believer, considered in his own person, deserves even according to the strictness of the divine law, no punishment ; and

and that merely because he repents and believes : and if so, repentance and faith satisfy the law, or are the curse of it, as I have already shown. If distributive justice be satisfied, it admits of no further punishment, and to punish him further, would be as positively unjust, as to continue a man's punishment, after he hath endured the full penalty of any law. If distributive justice be satisfied by Christ, in the behalf of sinners, then the rule of distributive justice is not the personal character of a man, but the character of his friend, his advocate, or representative ; any man has a right, on the footing of distributive justice, to be treated according to the character of his friend or representative. Therefore if a subject rebel against his sovereign, and procure a man of a most unexceptionable and amiable character, to represent him and plead his cause before his sovereign, he has a right on the footing of distributive justice, to be treated according to the character of his representative ; and if he be not thus treated, he suffers an injury ; he is abused. On

this principle, no prince or magistrate will have a right to punish, for any crime, a subject who can procure a man of a virtuous life, to represent him and plead his cause.

But perhaps it will be said, that distributive justice is satisfied by the death of Christ, because he placed himself in our stead, and suffered in our room; and that whenever a person thus substitutes himself for another, and suffers the punishment due to that other, that other hath a right to a discharge, as distributive justice is then satisfied. Now according to this objection, the true idea of distributive justice is, to treat a man either according to his own sufferings, or according to the sufferings of his representative. And if according to the sufferings of his representative, why not according to the obedience of his representative. And this brings us just where we were; that every man may in justice demand, to be treated according to the character of his representative; which is absurd.

Distributive justice therefore is not

at all satisfied by the death of Christ. But general justice to the deity and to the universe is satisfied. That is done by the death of Christ which supports the authority of the law, and renders it consistent with the glory of God and the good of the whole system, to pardon the sinner.

In the same sense the law of God is satisfied by the death of Christ : I mean as the divine glory and the general good, which are the great ends of the law, are secured. In this sense only is the atonement of Christ, properly called a satisfaction ; God is satisfied, as by it his glory and the good of his system are secured and promoted.

*Objection.* But is not distributive justice displayed in the death of Christ ?

*Answer.* The question is ambiguous : If the meaning be, is not distributive justice satisfied ? I answer, for the reasons already given, in the negative. If the meaning be, is there not an exhibition made in the death and sufferings of Christ, of the punishment to which the sinner is justly liable ? I answer in the

affirmative ; distributive justice is, in this sense, displayed in the death of Christ. But it is no more displayed, than the punishment of the sinner is displayed, in the death of Christ.

It may be proper here to notice the sense, in which justice admits of the salvation of sinners. It hath been said, that justice admits of several things which it does not demand : that it admits of the salvation of Paul, but does not demand it. And it would admit also of the damnation of Paul, but does not demand that. But in these instances the word justice is used in two very different senses, which ought to be carefully distinguished. When it is said, justice admits of the saivation of Paul, the third kind of justice before described, must be intended. The general good admits it : neither the glory of God nor the good of the system, opposes it.

But distributive justice, which requires every man to be treated according to his personal character, does not admit that Paul should be saved : so far as this kind of justice says any thing

concerning this matter, it demands that Paul be punished according to law : and if this justice be made the rule of proceeding in the case, Paul will inevitably be cast off. This kind of justice no more admits of the salvation of Paul than it admits of the salvation of Judas. But it is said, that “ justice admits of the salvation of Paul, but does not demand it.” Justice to the universe does demand it, as fully as admit of it, and the universe would suffer an injury, if he were not to be saved : but justice to the universe, neither demands nor admits of the salvation of Judas. Whereas distributive justice to Paul personally, as much demands that he be not saved, as that Judas be not saved.

But if we will make a distinction between what justice admits and what it demands, the true and only distinction seems to be this : justice admits of any thing which is not positively unjust ; of any favor however great or manifold : but it demands nothing, but barely what is just, without the least favor, and which being refused, positive injustice

would be done. Distributive justice then admits of the salvation of Judas or of any other sinner ; as surely no injustice would be done Judas in his salvation ; but it demands not this, as it is a mere favor, or something beyond the bounds of mere justice ; or it is no injury to Judas, that he is not saved. Neither does distributive justice demand the salvation of Paul. But public justice both admits and demands both the salvation of Paul and the damnation of Judas. On the other hand, it neither admits nor demands the damnation of Paul, nor the salvation of Judas. But distributive justice, according to the present distinction between the meaning of the words admit, and demand, though it admits both of the salvation and damnation of both Paul and Judas ; yet demands neither the salvation nor damnation, of the one or the other : or, to express the same thing in other words ; no injustice would be done either to Paul or Judas personally, if they were both saved or both damned. Distributive justice never demands the punishment

of any criminal, in any instance ; because no injury would be done him, if he were graciously pardoned. It demands only that a man be not punished being innocent : or be not punished beyond his demerit ; and that he be rewarded according to his positive merit.

These observations may help us to understand a distinction, which to many hath appeared groundless or perplexing : I mean the distinction of the merit of condignity and merit of congruity. Merit of both these kinds refers to rewards only, and has no reference to punishments : and that is deserved by a merit of condignity which cannot be withholden without positive injury. That is deserved by a merit of congruity which is a proper expression of the sense which the person rewarding, has of the moral excellency of the person rewarded ; which however may be withholden without positive injury. Of the former kind is the merit, which every good and faithful citizen has, of protection in his person, liberty and property, and the merit of a laborer who has earned his



wages. These cannot be withholden without positive injury. Of the latter kind is the merit, which some eminently wise and virtuous citizens have, of distinguishing honors or marks of esteem. If these be withholden, the proper objects of them, may indeed be said to be neglected, but not positively injured.

This subject teaches also, in what sense God was under obligation to accept, on the behalf of the sinner, the mediation and atonement of Christ. It hath been said, that when Christ offered to make atonement for sinners, God was under the same obligation to accept the offer, as a creditor is to accept the proposal of any man, who offers to pay the debt of another. This is not true : because in matters of property, all that the creditor hath a right to, is his property. This being offered him, by whomsoever the offer be made, he has the offer of his right ; and if he demand more, he exceeds his right ; and he has no more right to refuse to give up the obligation, on the offer of a third person to pay the debt, than to refuse

the same, when the same offer is made by the debtor himself. All will own, that if a creditor were to refuse to receive payment, and give up the obligation, when the debtor offers payment; it would be abusive and unjust: and let any man assign a reason why it is not equally abusive and unjust, not to receive the payment, and to give up the obligation, when payment is offered by a third person.

But it is quite otherwise in atoning for crimes, in which distributive, not commutative justice is concerned. As the rule of distributive justice is the personal character of the person to be rewarded or punished, and not property; if a magistrate refuse to accept any substitute, and insist on punishing the criminal himself, he treats him no otherwise, than according to his personal character, and the criminal suffers no injustice or abuse. Nor is the magistrate under any obligation of distributive justice, or justice to the criminal himself, to accept a substitute.

It is true, that the circumstances of

the case may be such, that it may be most conducive to the public good, that the offered substitute be accepted: in this case wisdom and goodness or public justice will require that it be accepted, and the criminal discharged.

This leads me to observe, that it hath also been said that when Christ offered to become a substitute, and to make atonement for sinners, God was under no obligation to accept the proposal. This, I conceive, is as wide of the truth, as that he was under the same obligation to accept the proposal, as a creditor is to accept the proposal of a third person to pay the debt of his friend. The truth is, the glory of God and the greatest good of the moral system, did require, that Christ should become a substitute for sinners; and that his offered substitution should be accepted by God. This was dictated and recommended by both wisdom and goodness. So far therefore as wisdom and goodness could infer an obligation on the Father, to accept the substitution of his Son, he was under obligation to accept it. But this

obligation was only that of the third kind of justice before explained, a regard to the general good.

This subject further teaches us, that that constitution which requires an atonement, in order to the pardon of the sinner, is nothing arbitrary. That divine constitution which is wise and good, as being necessary to the good of the moral system, is not arbitrary. But if an atonement was necessary, in order to support the authority of the divine law, and the honor, vigor and even existence of the divine moral government, while sinners are pardoned; undoubtedly that constitution which requires an atonement, in order to the pardon of the sinner, is the dictate of wisdom and goodness, and by no means, of an arbitrary spirit.

Hence we also learn in what sense the death of Christ renders God propitious to sinners. It does so only as it supports the authority of his law and government, and renders the pardon of sinners consistent with the good of the system, and the glory of God.

Finally ; this subject teaches the groundlessness of that objection to the doctrine of atonement, that it represents the deity as inexorable. If to refuse to pardon sinners unless it be in a way which is consistent with the good of the moral system, is to be inexorable ; then that God will not pardon sinners without atonement, or in a way which is inconsistent with the authority of his law, and with the authority and even existence of his moral government ; is indeed a proof, that God is inexorable. But unless it be an instance of inexorability, that God will pardon sinners, unless it be in a way which is consistent with the good of the moral system, there is no ground to object to the doctrine of atonement, that it represents the deity as inexorable. On the other hand ; that God requires an atonement in order to pardon, is an instance and proof of truly divine goodness : and if he were to pardon without an atonement, it would prove, that he is destitute of goodness, and regardless, not only of his own glory, but of the true happiness of the system of his moral creatures.—END.

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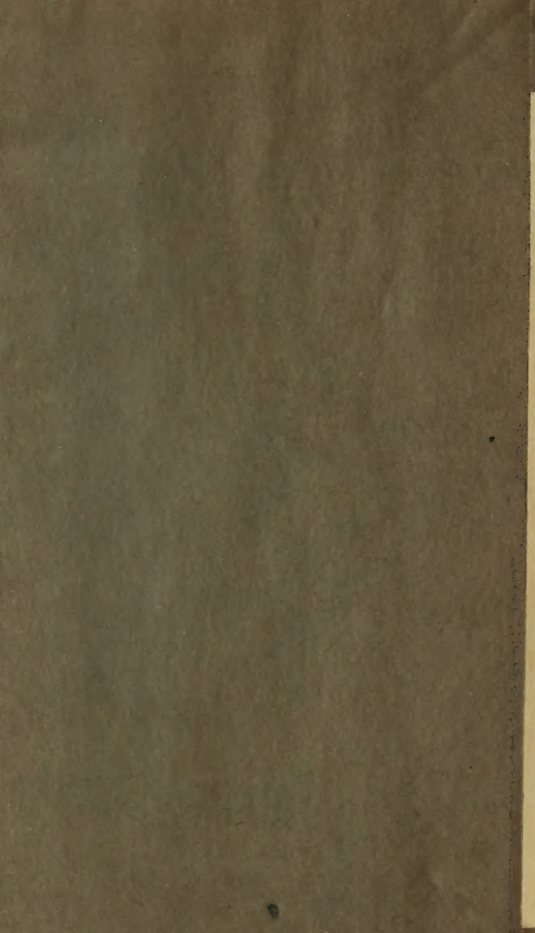
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